

Shabbat Shalom
from Rabbi Michael Gold

Candle Lighting Time
Fri. Evening 7:59 pm

Services Sat. July 11 9:30 AM

Tisha B'Av – Evening services for Tisha B'Av will take place Wed. July 22 at 7:30 pm. This is the saddest day of the Jewish year, where we commemorate the destruction of both Temples in Jerusalem and the other tragedies that have occurred throughout history. It is a full fast day (some Conservative Jews fast only through the early afternoon, recognizing that the tragedies have been mitigated by the founding of Israel.) In the evening we pray in a somber tone, read the book of Lamentations, and chant sad poems known as *kinot*. In terms of its mood and melodies, I find the evening of Tisha B'Av to be one of the most beautiful services of the year.

Here is my message for this week.

PARSHAT MATOT-MASEI
OUR HATE IS HERE TO STAY

“Along with their other victims, they slew the kings of Midian: Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba, the five kings of Midian. They also put Balaam son of Beor to the sword.” (Numbers 31:8)

Several years ago, during my annual trip to visit family in my hometown of Los Angeles, I went to the Hollywood Bowl. It is one of the greatest entertainment venues in the world. That night the late singer Tony Bennett was performing. A highlight of his concert was when he was joined by his dear friend Lady Gaga, who was 60 years his junior. One of the songs he sang is the old George and Ira Gershwin classic, “Our love is here to stay.” If my dad were alive, he would have been thrilled. He used to sing the song regularly. “In time the Rockies may crumble, Gibraltar may tumble, they’re only made of clay. But our love is here to stay.” It was an evening of warm, beautiful feelings.

Unfortunately, I do not have warm beautiful feelings. when I look out into the world today. It seems more realistic to say, “our hate is here to stay.” We already see a sign of that in this difficult double portion. Two weeks ago, we read the story of the heathen prophet, Balaam, hired by Balak to curse the Israelites. He is the Balaam whose donkey talked back to him, a story where the animal had more ethical insights than the human. As Balaam stood on a hillside trying to curse the Israelites, God changed his curses into blessings. In fact, we recite one of those blessings whenever

we walk into synagogue. “How goodly are your tents O Jacob, your dwelling places O Israel” (Numbers 24:5). One would think that after these events Balaam would have gone home, convinced that the Israelites are blessed by God.

Sadly, Balaam’s hatred of Israel became even greater. He was the ringleader of the orgy led by the Midianites to undermine the morals of the Israelites. In a very difficult passage in this week’s portion, the Israelites begin a war of vengeance against the Midianites. During this war, Balaam’s hatred finally comes to an end. He is killed in battle.

I can share numerous contemporary examples of this hatred that will not go away. Let me share three. First example: In Brooklyn, Congressman Dan Goldman, who lost his primary bid to return to Congress, went to Poetica Coffee. The coffee house returned his money and said that his business was no longer welcome. The business claimed that it would not serve “genocide enablers.” The coffee shop is being investigated by the Department of Justice. The sad irony is that Goldman had been critical of Israeli policy. But it did not matter. He is a Jew who refuses to denounce Zionism. Therefore, he is no longer welcome in one coffee house. And since he lost the primary to a more progressive candidate, he is no longer welcome in Congress.

Second example: This week the singer Taylor Swift married the football player Travis Kelce. (Mazel Tov!) I heard the wedding was beautiful and elegant. (Unfortunately, I was not invited.). Internet trolls have attacked Swift and Kelce regarding the wedding. Why? The marriage was performed by Adam Sandler, who is a proud, outspoken Jew. To quote one tweet attacking Swift for not being more outspoken in opposing Israel, “...she had Adam Sandler, a well-known Zionist, officiate at her wedding, so we know where she stands now.” A Jew, unless he or she is willing to denounce Israel and Zionism, is a persona non-grata.

Third example: In Colorado, Democratic socialist Melat Kiros defeated a long-time House incumbent. She refused to condemn a firebomb attack on Jewish protesters in Boulder which killed one woman and permanently injured others. She blamed Israel, claiming that the actions of the Jewish state were putting the Jewish people in danger. This woman who refuses to condemn antisemitic violence will soon probably represent Colorado in Congress.

British journalist Melanie Phillips, a passionate defender of Western values and Israel, writes that the hate is here to stay. To quote her new book, “The forces involved in this onslaught against Israel and the Jews are enormous – global, highly organized, and hugely funded. By definition, antisemitism, which is based on irrational and paranoid hatred of Jews that is hardwired into Western culture, can’t be tackled by facts and evidence.” (*Fighting the Hate.*) Hatred is a sad reality of our world today.